



County of Santa Cruz

COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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Commission on the Environment

Work Plan

Calendar Years 2023 and 2024

Overview

Consistent with its by-laws, the Commission on the Environment (COE) will focus on priority environmental issues, policies, and projects, with the intent of taking one or more of the following actions:

- Advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and make recommendations on ways to improve and protect the environment to ensure the long-term environmental sustainability of the County;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors on establishing specific goals that support the County's Climate Action Strategy; advise on actions to protect the County from the hazards of climate change; and assist the BOS in developing policies and programs to meet climate-related goals;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors and work with other commissions to review updates of County policies so that they provide a comprehensive course of action to support environmental goals in both the public and private sectors;
- Serve as an information clearing house to the Board of Supervisors and other county commissions about proposed and pending legislation, both state and federal, which may impact the environment;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors on potential areas of cooperation with other public agencies and private organizations to plan and implement effective environmental policies in Santa Cruz County;
- Proactively identify environmental issues of concern that are not being addressed by other advisory bodies to the BOS; and

- Exercise any other responsibilities that may be set forth in the commission’s bylaws or as may be directed by the Board of Supervisors.

Schedule

The timing of COE actions and the order in which the issues below will be addressed will be determined by consulting the BOS master calendar and by communicating with Supervisors and staff about county processes and target dates.

Milestones and Metrics

The COE will use the goals, strategies, and objectives of the County Operational Plan, particularly those identified in the Sustainable Environment section, to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of COE activities.

Prioritized Environmental Issues, Policies and Projects for 2023-2024

In calendar years 2023 and 2024 the Commission on the Environment will focus on the following issues:

(1) Anticipate and Respond to Issues before the Board of Supervisors

Background: The COE is an advisory commission to the BOS. As issues arise, they can be brought to the COE by Supervisors, commissioners, or County staff. The BOS maintains a master calendar containing future agenda items and issues that may be brought before the BOS.

COE Role and Actions: The COE will regularly review the BOS master calendar for environmental issues in order to provide timely advice to the BOS. The COE will also request information from County staff and the community regarding emerging environmental issues. Commissioners will seek information related to environmental issues potentially affecting the county, discuss such issues at COE meetings, and make recommendations to the BOS on issues of concern.

(2) County Climate Action

The COE will focus on the following five aspects of climate action in Santa Cruz County:

A. Climate Action Strategy Development and Implementation

Background: The BOS approved the Climate Action Strategy (CAS) in 2013 and directed each County department to implement respective sections of the plan. Annually, each participating department must submit progress reports on their climate-related work, which are compiled into an annual report to the BOS each spring. Annual reports for 2014 to 2020 can be found here:

<http://www.sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/SustainabilityPlanning/ClimateActionStrategy.aspx>

In 2022, County staff developed a draft Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP), which was a focus of 2022 COE meetings and review. At a regular meeting on December 13, 2022, the BOS unanimously approved a motion to:

- Approve the Santa Cruz County 2022 CAAP;
- Approve the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets for 2030 and 2045 as set forth by current state law and presented in the 2022 CAAP;
- Approve the use of the 2022 CAAP Equity Guardrails as a framework for ensuring County actions address equity during implementation;
- Approved the Drought Response Outreach Plan (DROP) as a plan for well users and water systems to prepare for drought; and
- Direct staff to return on April 25, 2023, with an update on CAAP goal indicators, strategy metrics and a plan for engagement and implementation.

COE Role and Actions: The COE will make recommendations as the CAAP is completed and regularly updated, and advise the BOS on the related tasks including GHG reduction targets, Equity Guardrails, and plans listed in the above motion. The COE will provide contacts to appropriate experts and other resources. The COE will annually hear one or more presentations by staff from County Planning or the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience (OR3) on each year’s Climate Action Annual Report. The COE will review implementation status reports and comment as appropriate.

B. Maintain Continuity with the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan (SSCCP) and the County Operational Plan (COP)

COE Role and Actions:

- The COE will request staff presentations on Sustainability Updates to General Plan and its EIR as these come up for review or modification.
- The COE will request a presentation from the Assistant County Administrative Officer on Operational Plan revisions and implementation.

C. Mitigation Actions

Background: County departments continue to address the issues of greenhouse gas emissions reduction and preparation for anticipated impacts of climate change.

Current Status: Implementation of the Climate Action Strategy (CAS) and CAAP involves a wide variety of activities by multiple County departments that are addressing the issues of greenhouse gas emissions reduction and preparation for the anticipated impacts of climate change. Periodic evaluation of greenhouse gas emissions has shown these efforts are resulting in measurable emissions reductions at major County government facilities and in the residential and commercial sectors of the community.

COE Role and Actions: To support the County’s Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) development, implementation, and continuous improvement, the COE will share

information about best practices, examples of effective programs, and community needs that may be suitable for inclusion in the CAAP.

The COE will track and recommend County actions to continue reductions in carbon emissions, including:

- Adequate Staffing – Evaluate and recommend appropriate staffing to oversee and coordinate climate change mitigation initiatives identified in the County’s Climate Action Strategy.
- Public Forum – Provide a public education forum and monitor progress by receiving regular updates from the Planning Department on major implementation and evaluative milestones.
- CAS/CAAP Annual Report – Review the CAS/CAAP Annual Report due each April to the BOS.

D. Adaptation Actions

Background: Santa Cruz County has historically been impacted by drought, wildfire, and flooding from both streams and ocean storms. These impacts are exacerbated by a changing climate that is raising sea levels, increasing the magnitude of storms, and lengthening the duration of droughts. The County is dedicated to preparing for these events and limiting the damage to life, property and infrastructure.

Current Status: The County Climate Action Strategy and draft CAAP describe the importance of achieving the twin goals of emissions reduction and climate change adaptation. The Planning Department regularly updates the County’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and General Plan Safety Element to address vulnerability to a range of climate change related hazards such as fire, flood, drought, and sea level rise. In addition, after many years of negotiations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has included funding in their 2021 Civil Works Plan to complete preconstruction engineering and design to provide flood control on the Pajaro River.

COE Role and Actions: The Commission will utilize its network of contacts at the local, regional, and State level to:

- Inform the County’s prioritization of climate change adaptation actions, including updates to the County’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and General Plan Safety Element, and planning for Pajaro River flood control;
- Identify potential grant and other financial resource opportunities;
- Request presentations by representatives of regional organizations, including the Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation (ARCCA), and the Central Coast Climate Collaborative (C4), summarizing their conference topics of emerging trends, lessons learned, etc.;
- Review and comment on the Capital Improvement Program to consider all relevant environmental constraints, including those influenced by climate change, such as sea level rise, flooding, and fire hazards, to make projects more resilient.

E. Central Coast Community Energy

Background: Over the past decade, Santa Cruz City and County staff initiated partnerships with other service districts and government representatives to establish Central Coast Community Energy (3CE) as a community power authority to help achieve regional climate action goals. The technical study completed to evaluate the potential of Community Choice Aggregation for the Central Coast noted that the program would likely provide multiple benefits, including:

- Providing customers with a choice of power providers;
- Increasing local control over energy rates and other energy-related matters;
- Providing electric rates that are competitive with those provided by the utility predecessor;
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions arising from electricity usage in the region;
- Increasing local and regional renewable generation capacity;
- Increasing energy conservation and efficiency projects and programs;
- Increasing regional energy self-sufficiency; and
- Improving the local economy by implementing new local renewable and energy conservation and efficiency projects.

Current Status: To date, the 3CE has become fiscally viable and provides customers with competitively priced, low carbon energy. New programs are being developed to support energy efficiency, electrification of our transportation system and initial investigations into local renewable energy generation.

COE Role and Actions: Because County climate goals focus on similar categories of carbon emissions reductions as 3CE, the COE will request an annual presentation from 3CE on the status of various projects and the results of 3CE activities.

Specifically, the COE would benefit from an annual presentation on:

- the power procurement portfolio,
- new programs being implemented,
- climate goals of these programs and status of their implementation,
- future partnerships to advance 3CE local generation, storage, and energy efficiency programs, and
- other technical and programmatic concepts that may help the County implement their CAS/CAAP.

(3) State and Federal Legislation

Background: Information about pending State and Federal legislation related to the issues, policies and actions listed in this workplan may be submitted from time to time by individual commissioners, County staff or organizations in which the County is a member, such as the California State Association of Counties or the League of Cities. The COE may consider requests from these sources for advisory letters to the BOS related to such

legislation. The COE will focus on legislative activities related to the County 2021 Legislative Prospectus and the priorities of this workplan.

COE Role and Actions:

- (a) The COE will identify high priority legislative activities and invite presentations from members of the California Assembly and Senate, and members of the US House of Representatives or their staff.
- (b) Public Forum – Sufficient time will be set aside at each COE meeting for discussing pending State and Federal Legislation. Individual COE commissioners, County staff members or organizations in which the County is a member are responsible for developing summaries of pending legislation for the COE’s consideration. For time management purposes, extensive discussion beyond a 10-minute time allotment will be scheduled for future COE meetings in consideration of other priority meeting topics, unless a majority vote by the COE approves additional time.
- (c) Advisory – The COE will develop advisory letters as necessary to the BOS to support proactive management of the underlying environmental concerns and assure effective compliance with State and Federal mandates and regulations.
- (d) Monitor – The COE will request a report back from the proposing party regarding legislative actions taken. The COE will determine the need for additional advocacy with the BOS.

(4) Environmental Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Background and Current Status

Promoting equity and environmental justice have become central themes of governance in Santa Cruz County. The County Sustainability Policy and Regulatory Update address environmental justice as part of a comprehensive update to the County’s General Plan/Local Coastal Program and modernization of the County Code to support more sustainable communities in Santa Cruz County. Environmental justice is woven throughout the Sustainability Update by identifying policies and programs that support and prioritize services to disadvantaged populations. The Sustainability Update also includes mapping of disadvantaged communities, which are defined as population groups that are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution or hazards, have high concentrations of low-income households, high rates of unemployment, low levels of homeownership, high rent burdens, vulnerable populations, or low levels of educational attainment (Health and Safety Code [HSC] section 39711). In December, 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved the Sustainability Update project. Adopted documents are being submitted to the Coastal Commission for final certification.

COE Role and Actions:

COE actions target two inter-related objectives:

- (1) To advise the County and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on the environmental justice aspects of the above-listed policies and similar equity-diversity-inclusion-justice initiatives, and

(2) To be representative of the broader community and conduct COE business in a manner that effectively solicits and considers information and perspectives from the entire community, including historically underrepresented, disadvantaged, or environmentally vulnerable populations.

As a commission that advises on environmental decisions affecting the entirety of Santa Cruz County, the COE is dedicated to promoting principles of equity and environmental justice. While described here as an enumerated section of this work plan, the intent is to integrate an overall approach into all commission endeavors to ensure consideration of environmental justice in all aspects of the COE's work.

The COE will prioritize fairness across race, gender, LGBTQ+, and socioeconomic status in all environmental issues addressed by the commission, and ensure that there is a process for diverse representation, access to information, and accountability to the community. The COE will actively encourage participation from and solicit the expertise of members of historically underrepresented or disadvantaged communities in the process of raising and addressing environmental issues. The COE will seek budgetary appropriations to support presentations made by invited experts who might otherwise not be able to participate.

The COE will actively engage with County initiatives such as A Santa Cruz Like Me to enhance recruitment efforts that reflect the entirety of the community. The COE will deliberately seek early input from community groups, individuals, students, and organizations to address environmental and environmental justice issues. For example, indigenous groups such as the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band have expertise in climate mitigation and adaptation for regenerative/resilient resource management. The COE will seek such input as part of developing work plans, creating agendas and conducting outreach for COE meetings. An appropriate number of COE regular meetings will be scheduled for venues in the southern part of the county.

(5) Ad hoc Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group (ICCWG)

Background: Many issues have aspects that can be addressed by the COE, the Water Advisory Commission (WAC) and/or the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission (FWAC). From time to time as needed, two or three designated COE commissioners will be directed to meet with members of WAC and the FWAC on an "ad hoc" basis. The purpose of these informational meetings will be to identify environmental issues at the intersection of commissions' responsibilities and determine those that need coordination or strategic focus. In addition, this allows an opportunity for commissioners to proactively identify environmental issues of concern that are not being adequately addressed by the COE or other advisory bodies to the BOS. The designated commissioners will regularly report back to the full COE with relevant information.

COE Role and Actions:

- (a) Public Forum – Time will be set aside as needed at each COE meeting for discussing issues identified. Designated COE commissioners are responsible for developing a brief summary of each issue to be discussed. For time management purposes, extensive discussion beyond a 10-minute time allotment will be scheduled for subsequent COE meetings in consideration of other priority meeting topics, unless a majority vote by the COE approves additional time.
- (b) Advisory – Develop advisory letters as necessary to the BOS.
- (c) Monitor – The COE ICCWG members should review WAC and FWAC agendas as they are posted to identify items of possible overlap or inattention among commissions.
- (d) ICCWG Meeting – Anticipate a meeting once each year, as needed, during which two or three COE commissioners would meet with a similar number of commissioners from the WAC and FWAC to discuss priorities for each Commission as well as any joint efforts. This meeting might be most useful in the late fall as the County begins development of annual budgets.
- (e) Share all COE meeting agendas and minutes with the WAC and FWAC.

Table 1. Commissioner and Staff Leads for each Issue

Commissioners, please put your name in boxes for issues you would like to focus on. Climate Action and Environmental Justice are currently the focus of Ad Hoc subcommittees.

Issue	Commissioner Leads	County Staff Leads
Issues Before the Board of Supervisors		David Carlson, Jason Hoppin
Climate Action		Tatiana Brennan
State & Federal Legislation		Jason Hoppin,
Environmental Justice		All
Ad Hoc Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group (ICCWG)		David Carlson, Sean Abbey, Sierra Ryan